

**Idaho State Emergency Communications Committee
Semi-Annual Meeting
September 20, 2005
1:00 p.m. – 4:30 p.m.**

Attendees:

Kathy Bessey	State Communications
Tom Lowther	South Central LAECC Chair
Lex Rutter	State of Idaho Department of Administration
Steve Franko	North Idaho LAECC Vice Chair
Vernon Preston	National Weather Service, Pocatello
Paul Flatt	National Weather Service, Boise
Dave Turnmire	Eastern Idaho LAECC Chair
Vicki Miller	Idaho State SECC Coordinator
Londa Huwa	Idaho Bureau of Homeland Security

Welcome & Introductions - Vicki Miller

Vicki Miller called to order the semi-annual meeting of the State Emergency Communications Committee (SECC), State of Idaho Emergency Alert System (EAS) at 1:00 p.m., September 20, 2005, at the Idaho Bureau of Homeland Security, 4040 Guard St., Bldg. 600, Boise, Idaho. Lex Rutter, Public Safety Communications Manager for State of Idaho Dept. of Administration, was introduced as a new member to the group.

Area Reports

North Area – Steve Franko

During the last six months, the LAECC conducted monthly meetings. The EAS in northern Idaho is continually being refined with the assistance of Nels Nelson, who is the head of communications in coordination with the Spokane Sherriff's office.

Southwest Area – Not represented

No report.

South Central Area – Tom Lowther

SIRCOM in Jerome has experienced changes in their employee status resulting in a need for additional training on EAS equipment. The South Central Area will conduct an LAECC meeting within the next six months.

Recently, an LP1 captured the text file output from their SAGE Endec and placed it on their website which allows online viewing of all alerts that have passed through the system for the month. This information is available on e-mail. Vicki Miller has the link if anyone is interested in seeing this information.

East Area – Dave Turnmire

No report.

EAS Tests, Equipment and Training

Tests

The committee discussed the addition of an addition to the Statewide EAS Plan concerning a representative from the committee conducting an annual visit the various sites around the state (example: ISP in Pocatello, etc.) to ensure that each site has consistent training/procedure materials and employees are trained on a regular schedule.

A problem occurred on the Sept. 19, 2005 EAS (RWT) test at 2:30 p.m. as a result of a disconnected ground wire, which occurred during a telephone systems transition at BHS to the military base telephone system. The problem was identified and has been corrected.

Dave Turnmire encouraged staff at each broadcast facility receiving EAS tests/alerts take responsibility for checking their EAS tapes each week to ensure the appropriate call letters for the entity sending the test/Alert are on the tape. It is easier to check the monthly test for problems because it affects more people. Everyone should be aware of missing tests/alerts on a weekly basis. Dave Turnmire places a list on the wall beside the receiver at his station for the staff to check and make sure they are receiving all the appropriate weekly and monthly tests. Vicki Miller would appreciate getting feedback on the RWT through the EAS list serve.

Since Vicki Miller doesn't receive feedback from the broadcasters, she depends on Ear Watch software for test and alert verification. This software sends Vicki an e-mail telling her if the test was transmitted. Ear Watch software is installed on computers at the dispatch centers in Pocatello, Twin Falls, Coeur d'Alene and Meridian. Deer Point was down for a period of time so it has been impossible to receive the e-mail. Vicki has requested that this software be moved from Microwave Services to State Communications so it can be monitored more closely.

Equipment

Funding has been secured to install a transmitter in Lewiston. Installation completion is targeted for 2006 summer and linked into the state microwave system.

Training

The Bureau of Homeland Security has ensured statewide continuity of EAS equipment by installing EAS equipment in the dispatch centers at Coeur d'Alene, two locations in Boise, Jerome, Pocatello and NWS in Pocatello. After a MOU is signed between the bureau and NWS, EAS equipment will be installed at NWS in Boise. These dispatch centers lack continuity in training, which is a high priority for the bureau. Kathy Bessey, State Communications, will travel to these locations and present a Train-the-Trainer EAS course for dispatchers to maintain statewide continuity of training. An annual refresher course will be provided for each state EAS dispatch center.

National Weather Service - Paul Flatt, Boise

Paul Flatt distributed a brochure on HAZCollect, which is an All-Hazards Emergency Message Collection System. It was developed by the National Weather Service in coordination and cooperation with the U.S. Department of Homeland Security and FEMA. The NWS tested the system in the last few weeks and it was very successful. There are a few minor technical difficulties which should be easily resolved. NWS has created a one entry point system that will help the "bounce back" problem and reduce any duplication problems.

Break – 15 minutes

Additional Items for Discussion – Vicki Miller

Actions Items from the last meeting of March 17, 2005.

- BHS will develop appreciation certificates for the LP's.
- Idaho State Broadcasters Association Meeting in Sun Valley.
Vicki Miller presented the Idaho Statewide Amber Alert Plan. There was a question from a Hispanic Station in Boise as to whether EAS can be broadcast in Spanish as well as English. The consensus was that the restriction of 45 seconds on the length of the message would not be compatible with the Spanish language. If the state could provide the message script to the Hispanic radio stations, they could translate it themselves and broadcast it over the air. There may be liability issues with the translation of the message. Dave Turnmire recommended that the Spanish speaking stations sign-up with the Amber Alert web porthole. More time and discussion is required for this issue.
- A flow chart for Idaho Statewide AMBER Alert Plan was distributed to the participants. The plan places the burden on local law enforcement agencies to determine if the criteria for an Amber Alert were met. The committee was concerned about 40 sheriffs with different interpretations of the criteria would be able to initiate the alert.

Question: What kind of training is available for the sheriffs?

Answer: ISP developed a training program that includes Amber Alert. They conducted statewide training to all law enforcement entities.

In order to prevent "finger pointing" among the agencies after an Amber Alert has been issued, Vicki Miller established a committee of Public Information Officers (PIO) for each agency involved with disseminating an Amber Alert. The BHS PIO serves as the lead PIO. In the event of an Amber Alert, the lead PIO conducts a conference call to ensure everyone receives consistent information. Paul Flatt offered assist the bureau by attending meetings and explaining the avenue taken by the Amber Alert committee to arrive at the current plan.

Question: In northern Idaho area, nine alerts were transmitted on the last Amber Alert test. What caused the problem?

Answer: The north LAECC discussed the problem in great detail. It is a double ended system that involves the Kootenai County Sheriff. He can actively receive any transmission from the 911 Center or receive the test from the state microwave, which transmits directly to the Kootenai County Sheriff's Office and the 911 Center. In this case, the sheriff's office can initiate or automatically receive the test. The 911 Center monitors the state microwave network as well as the sheriff's office. When the sheriff presses "go," the test transmits to the mountain top and the 911 Center identifies it as an EAS alert. The alert then transmits from the sheriff's system to the State of Washington, eastern Washington as well as the 911 Center, which repeats the test at the same time and again transmits the alert on the state microwave system. Nels Nelson (911) changed the filters on the 911 Center's EAS equipment, which corrected the problem.

State Agencies & Association Reports

Microwave Services – Lex Rutter

Microwave Services received the licenses for Salmon Baldy and Sedgwick Peak. The purchase order has arrived from BHS for the transmitter equipment. The radio is actually on the Salmon site, but has not been installed as Microwave Services is in the process of creating the site. The target date for site completion is Dec. 1, 2005.

There was discussion at a previous meeting about Utah installing a SAGE Endec unit at the Bear Lake transmitter site for the NWS to relay alerts from the Sedgwick Peak transmitter. This equipment would require a funding source.

Question: Prior to the Olympics, a microwave cable was installed between Idaho and Utah. Is it usable or required to make it functional?

Answer: Technically, it is usable but Lex does not have sufficient information on the requirements for making it operable. He will place it in the project book.

National Weather Service – Vernon Preston

Vern Preston was present when the last Amber Alert was disseminated a few weeks ago. From his perspective, the Statewide Amber Alert Plan worked.

The NWS office in Pocatello has a transmitter and has been working with Microwave Services for two years to install a weather radio on Relay Ridge. NWS tried to attain a grant through the U.S. Department of Agriculture, but the funds were not available. During the end of the fiscal year, the NWS had funds available, purchased the transmitter, and have an MOU in process. After October 1, the transmitter will be taken to Relay Ridge, which will serve eastern Bonneville County and the dark areas of Palisades, Teton County and into Wyoming, Island Park, portions of Clark County, and all of Madison and Jefferson Counties. Ken Fagnant and Vern Preston sent a letter to Bill Bishop, Director of BHS, regarding the availability of grant money to purchase a weather radio for the Salmon area that would serve an 80 mile radius. There has been no response to date from Bill Bishop.

State Communications – Kathy Bessey

CARS 511

Idaho Transportation Department will be going public with Cars 511 on November 1 (pending the Governor's Schedule). Microwave Services will internally test the program around the 28th of this month prior to public use. Using a memory stick has resolved the problem of capturing the EAS recording for an Amber Alert from the SAGE Endec and placing it onto CARS 511. The next unresolved issue is moving the wave file from the memory stick to the CARS 511 phone number to prevent multiple recordings from being used.

Dispatchers at State Communications are required to weekly practice initiating an EAS test or alert using EAS standard operating procedures. They practice the entire process, but do not send the alert.

Traffic Management System (ITS)

State Communications is still waiting on the central software deployment for the dynamic message signs for the Idaho Traffic Management System (ITS). The software should be deploying sometime in October or November and will control 18 message boards around the state. ITD plans to purchase approximately 20 signs within the next 2 years.

The priorities for posting a message on the message system:

- Priority 1- Highway emergencies
- Priority 2- Amber Alerts
- Priority 3- Buckle up campaigns

The ITS software will also send an e-mail message to participants that are signed-up (ie., Media). When an Amber Alert is posted, participants will receive an e-mail from the software when the electronic roadway sign is activated.

Idaho Broadcasters Association – Vicki Miller for Connie Searles

Connie Searles offered to provide the Idaho Transportation Department (ITD) with a soft match of \$100,000 for their Federal Transportation Grant in exchange for ITD providing a portion of the acquired funding for the Amber Alert Educational Committee. The Idaho Broadcasters Association would provide \$150,000 worth of media coverage for public announcements relating to Amber Alert, but ITD declined the offer. While other states allocated funding up to \$100,000 for Amber Alert public education, ITD did not designate any funding for the program.

Action Items

Vicki Miller – Place a link for south central areas LP1 alert information site on the BHS website within the EAS section.

Vicki Miller – Place RWT schedule along with the location sites and associated call letters on the BHS website. This information will enable the people that have the means to monitor the test to offer feedback.

Vicki Miller – Check with Rocky Watson regarding the Ear Watch list as some broadcasters are not receiving the e-mail messages.

Vicki Miller – Identify funding for a SAGE Endec unit for the Bear Lake transmitter.

Vicki Miller/Kathy Bessey – Complete the Volcano Event Standard Operating Procedure.

Steve Franko - Check with the north LAECC group about placing the EAR Watch list on their list serve.

Kathy Bessey – Contact the LAECC chairs when going into their area for training so they can attend the session(s).

LAECC Chairs – During the training sessions, collect information on how often the facilities will provide EAS training and send Vicki the information. She can document the frequently staff are testing EAS procedures for statewide consistency.

Lex Rutter - Provide Dave Turnmire with the frequency for the VHF transmitter.

Dave Turnmire – Send Vicki Miller the specifications for the Bear Lake SAGE Endec unit.

Other Discussion

It would be beneficial if each EAS area would place their monthly alert log on their web site. The LP1 in the south central area is posting their log.

Dave Turnmire has built a FAQ document for tracking answers to questions, tidbits of knowledge, and a list of software utilities in various forms with links to the websites.

Vicki Miller - Are the areas having yearly LAECC meetings?

Response – Mass e-mails are sent to committee members in lieu of meetings. This is in part to the low attendance at meetings in past years.

Response – The north LAECC conducts monthly meetings because of the uniqueness of the area and providing EAS alerts to eastern Washington counties. A large group meets monthly to discuss and resolve problems.

John Parker - BHS can purchase VHF receivers from Department of Lands for \$10 each. They can be distributed to the broadcasters if they need a receiver. The chairs will tally their areas and respond to Vicki the amount needed. John will find out if they are crystal or tunable and notify interested parties.

Steve Franko – EAS alerts in the northern area are mainly overseen by the local group in Spokane and the Sheriff. There is also a 911 center in Coeur d’Alene. At least once or twice a year the northern Idaho broadcasters transmit the Idaho alert and transmit the Washington alerts for the remainder of the year to test the system. The broadcasters encounter some problems when Idaho creates an Idaho “all alert” because it is also disseminated through the Spokane chapter. The LAECC has discussed dividing the counties in the north, but the issue has not been resolved. All alerts in the northern area are funneled through the sheriff. It creates a problem with the system when monitoring the state network as it comes from the mountain top above Spokane and bounces the signal back either into Coeur d’Alene or Spokane. This redundancy causes broadcasters to decide on a monthly basis whether to accept the Idaho test or the Washington test. When an Amber Alert occurs, it further complicates the system.

Question: When the Washington EOC in Tacoma issues a statewide a EAS RMT or RWT, how does this effect northern Idaho?

Answer: Across Washington State, there is a two-way radio network that is monitored by all the legal entities such as sheriffs, Washington State Patrol and Spokane as an official input into the sheriff’s office. If western Washington is scheduled for the RMT, it will transmit through the system to Spokane and the sheriff’s office. The sheriff’s office determines if the EAS message needs to be transmitted to the broadcast stations and re-filters the message.

Eastern British Columbia and Alberta Canada have queried the northern area communications people in regards to participating in EAS. It was decided that the governmental differences and politics prevent this interaction from occurring.

Question: Are there any MOU’s in place?

Answer: Ken Holms has knowledge of MOUs as he has communicated with various states and conducted discussions and trainings.

Suggestions for Change in the Idaho State EAS Plan

Dave Turnmire – Page 11 (list of various L codes for state broadcasters), “Civil Authorities” Section should be eliminated. It speaks of townships and villages which do not pertain to Idaho. The plan does not account for such facilities as dispatch centers. Suggest including a list of call signs for the five major entry points with the following wording: The five currently authorized systems are SIRCOM (call sign), Pocatello (call sign), Coeur d’Alene (call sign), Meridian (call sign) and Gowen Field (call sign).

Next Meeting

Tuesday, March 21, 2006
Idaho Bureau of Homeland Security
4040 Guard St., Bldg. 600
Boise, ID
1:00 p.m. – 4:30 p.m.